



# Political Media Buying in 2012

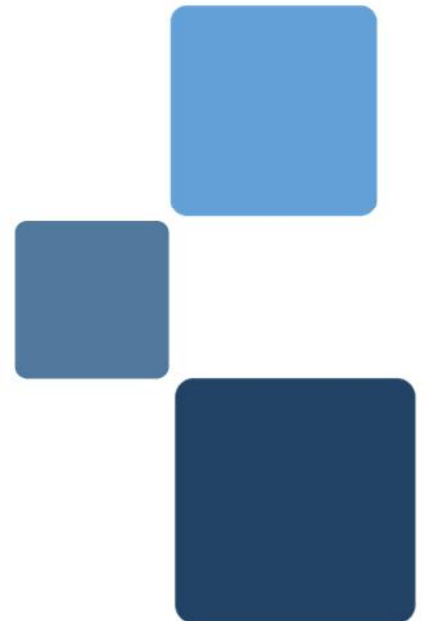
---

Tactics, Expected Spending and Strategies

Capitol Media Solutions  
JT Hroncich, President

[www.capitolmediasolutions.com](http://www.capitolmediasolutions.com)

**Advertising** *Excellence*





## Political Media Buying in 2012

The 2012 U.S. election cycle is shaping up to be one of the biggest battles in history with the presidential election, 435 Congressional and 33 Senates seats, 11 gubernatorial contests and thousands of state and local campaigns, propositions, initiatives and referendums vying for voter support. Many races are expected to be tight, especially in swing states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida and Virginia.

Gaining a foothold over the competition largely depends on advertising placement, which Ad Age predicts will reach unprecedented proportions in 23 states next year. Politicians not only play a guessing game in determining when, where, and how often to run an ad, but they also must balance the budget against reaching the right target audience with the most effective messages.

The appropriate messages at the precise time can play a pivotal role in determining the outcome of a tight race. The expenses for advertising slots are increasing, while the amount of available inventory is decreasing due to the competition. This requires politicians to make agonizing choices between promoting their campaign in areas that offer lower fees but reach a wide range of constituents versus placing the right ads in expensive areas.

Because pricing and scheduling can be tricky, political candidates need a media buyer who is experienced in negotiating, placing and posting advertising messages. The most successful campaigns employ a strategic communication plan to reach constituents with an engaging message, at the correct time, through the most effective medium, in a cost-effective manner.

### Traditional Media Buying Tactics

Breaking all previous records, an estimated \$2.6 billion to \$2.8 billion was spent on television advertisements during the 2007-08 political campaign season. Although the 2010-11 cycle dipped to \$2.3 billion, industry experts' estimate this year's spending could potentially reach as high as \$4 billion.

Campaigning through television commercials has become big business since the strategy was first used by the Kennedy camp in 1960. Since then, broadcast television advertising has become the dominant means for communicating with the public. The medium not only captures the attention of the largest number voters at one time, but it also provides the lowest per-capita cost. Additionally, television allows politicians to tailor targeted messages to specific demographic profiles by airing commercials at key times in the day and during popular programs.

It is common for the advertising season to run anywhere from 10 to 20 weeks before ballots are cast. To maximize advertising dollars, media buyers must make critical decisions about where to run ads and



how frequently. Each campaign phase requires a different approach. During the early primary weeks, biographical and issue-based messages are released to inform engaged voters. A planned fundraising trip to a city is often preceded by ads on cable news networks that are supportive of the candidate's politics.

Ads become more competitive in the final weeks, spotlighting several issues and responding to oppositional attacks. Additionally, while initial messages may focus on introducing the candidate to voters, ads appearing closer to Election Day become focused on the most pressing voter concerns. Meanwhile, all these messages are supported by direct mail, radio, Internet, roadside and billboard signs as well as phone campaigns.

A candidate's status plays a predominant role in ad frequency. A popular or unchallenged incumbent spends significantly less than a challenger who is entering a competitive race. In major markets, like California and Florida, media buying firms run daily advertisements to boost their clients' campaigns and initiatives.

### **Expected Media Spending on Political Campaigns in 2012**

Harmelin Media and Kantar Media both forecast spending in 2012 on television networks, radio stations and other platforms will cap out at \$3.2 billion, while MediaVest predicts the amount might reach \$4 billion. If MediaVest is correct, spending will grow by 30 percent.

According to the Federal Election Commission, presidential candidates alone have already collected in excess of \$181 million, with Obama generating \$86.2 million in contributions and Republican candidate Mitt Romney coming in at a distant second with \$32.2 million. While Romney has spent nearly twice as much as all Republican challengers with \$17.9 million, he has been incredibly outpaced by Obama, who has already dropped \$106.9 million on advertising.

The heat is just as intense at the local level. During the 2011 primaries, the Kantar Media Campaign Media Analysis Group reports, 17,151 political commercials aired in Iowa during the primary campaigns. Nearly 10,600 featuring negative messages. In short, \$3.3 million was spent on negative ads to combat the \$1.7 spent on positive messages.

Despite the heavy airplay campaign messages are already receiving, voters can expect a deluge of commercials to hit the small screen in the final eight weeks leading up to Election Day. Harmelin Media estimates more than 50 percent of advertising expenditures will be distributed to television campaigns, with 80 percent of the budget being used for local broadcast spots. This prediction is backed by



MediaVest, which noted in a recent report that nearly 85 percent of advertising in 2008 aired on local stations.

The advertising war will receive a significant financial boost in 2012 due to the Supreme Court's recent ruling that corporations, unions and nonprofit organizations can legally spend money directly on a campaign rather than making direct contributions. These Super PACs, which now possess the power to create their own commercials, are expected to radically influence how political advertising is conducted. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, on the Republican side of the divide, the American Crossroads group will singlehandedly contribute \$240 million toward the 2012 presidential election, while Obama has earmarked a record-breaking \$1 billion for his media budget.

Yet victory no longer belongs to the candidate who spends the most money on broadcast advertising. California Republican gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman dropped nearly \$144 million of her own money on television and radio spots during the 2010 primary campaign. Despite her underdog status, the former eBay CEO, who has an estimated net worth of \$1.3 billion, handily defeated her competitor by 37 percentage points to secure the right to challenge Governor Jerry Brown. However, she ultimately lost the November election to Brown.

### **Political Advertising Strategies for 2012**

The most successful political campaigns are built on a diverse communication strategy. To rise above the clatter, marketers must develop targeted brand messages for specific audiences, and they must deliver those messages through various platforms. Traditional means of communicating with the public, such as broadcast television, cable news programs, radio, newspapers, magazines, direct mail and local events, now compete with new media technology to capture the attention, and influence the opinion, of the voting public.

Broadcast television is expected to top media budgets in the coming election cycle because it provides unparalleled reach and impact. The majority of dollars will be directed toward national broadcast, cable news and digital satellite services. In an effort to capture those dollars, TV stations are offering customizable ads across multiple platforms by integrating digital sub-channels, hyper-local websites, mobile marketing and community event sponsorships. This provides candidates with better opportunities for connecting with and engaging potential voters.

Although television will take center stage this year, online digital advertising is expected to experience tremendous growth. As DVRs increasingly make live TV obsolete, ratings have decreased, which means media buyers must purchase more units to reach the masses. Additionally, this year's tight races will put a strain on available advertising space inventory, especially at the local levels.



Alongside online advertising, mobile media marketing will play a critical role in disseminating information to voters. The proliferation of bloggers and the immediate accessibility of social media venues also provide citizens with channels to discuss provocative ads and debate pertinent issues. In fact, analysis of the 2010 Senate and Congressional races reveals a strong correlation between victories and strong, integrated media strategies.

Whether rallying for a position or an issue, social media can be the optimal medium for starting a grassroots movement. The first to embrace new media, many credit Obama's resounding success in 2008 to his savvy use of modern communication technologies, including Twitter, mobile marketing, YouTube videos, email blasts and interactive websites that delivered daily updates on the campaign's progress. Launching the largest media campaign in political history, the Obama camp employed traditional business strategies, such as integrating Google search terms into their posts and placing banner ads in front of key voting demographics.

"The elections in 2012 could be won or lost on the success of get-out-the-vote efforts being led by social media," asserts MediaVest.

Media buyers can also expect HD web streaming videos that support Flash, WMV, Quicktime, Facebook and LinkedIn to make a strong appearance in 2012. These high-quality videos, hosted on premium video content sites such as YouTube.com, ESPN3.com and MLB.com, not only reach an invested, captive audience, but digital videos can also use ZIP code geotargeting to deliver the right messages to niche groups. Online digital advertising, which has an unlimited available inventory, allows media buyers to bypass expensive media markets in competitive districts as well.

According to Ad Age, websites such as Hulu are poised to benefit greatly from this increased attention. In 2008, the online television service served as an important platform for disseminating campaign messages, and it has been instrumental in educating the public about the Obama for America jobs bill. Hulu has also played an important role in other high-profile campaigns, including those for Meg Whitman, former Governor Ted Strickland in Ohio and Governor Deval Patrick in Massachusetts.

The challenge for these online venues is meeting the needs of political campaigns. At present, Hulu is notably more expensive than YouTube, which established itself as the platform for digital media back in 2008 when Obama and John McCain both heavily advertised their messages on the social website. Additionally, while Hulu allows advertisers to blacklist programs that do not align with their values, they cannot currently choose high-profile programs that attract widespread attention.

Data released by ComScore in September reveals 80 percent of Hulu patrons who are eligible to vote participated in the 2008 presidential and 2010 mid-term races, yet politicians traditionally ignore



younger audiences who are less likely to cast a vote. Still, industry experts estimate media buyers will dedicate roughly 15 percent of their advertising budgets to digital and social media in this coming year.

As in years past, a significant portion of budgets will be dedicated to developing and responding to negative ads. The technique of choice for 2012, according to the New York Times, will be using film archives of things opponents have said and done in an effort to discredit them. Uncovering this footage is becoming increasingly easier for opposition researchers as news websites, such as C-Span, digitize and post their video archives online.

This not only offers an affordable video production option since most images are already provided, but also the documentary feel of the ads appears to resonate more strongly with voters. As the public grows weary of messages relayed through official filters, they “are looking more discretely at the messages being presented by campaigns, and I think that is one reason the debates are more impactful this time,” Tad Devine, a Democratic media strategist, told the New York Times on Dec. 26, 2011.

### **Media Buyers Provide Unparalleled Support**

Without volunteers, a political campaign is dead before it hits the ground. Unpaid volunteers and interns canvass voters, maintain databases, stuff envelopes and solicit contributions from everyone they know. However, while a fundamental passion for the candidate cannot be matched, volunteers rarely bring the right mix of skills and talent to the table to ensure the final ballots cast on Election Day favor their candidate.

In contrast, expert political media consultants possess in-depth knowledge of political broadcast regulations. This is especially important in the age of new media when the rules are so fluid that they change almost on a daily basis. An experienced media buyer also has strong relationships with journalists and publishers, which places them in an advantageous position to negotiate cost-effective deals. The time and venue of each ad placement is determined by valuable research that provides insight into voters’ party affiliation, lifestyle and voting preference.

[Capitol Media Solutions](#) works closely with each client, as partners, to manage every aspect of the media campaign. Value-added services range from identifying voting patterns among varying demographics to unearthing intelligence about the opposition. This empowers candidates to react quickly and cost-effectively to race-changing developments at a moment’s notice.

Just like any business, political candidates and organizations must create a clear and consistent brand that resonates with their constituents. Capitol Media Solutions not only seeks to understand who you are and what you represent, but also what messages produce the best results for heightening your brand image. Our extensive media relationships mean you receive the best placement opportunities



available at the most affordable prices, allowing your team to focus on the issues that make a difference in the communities you serve.

### **References/Further Reading**

<http://www.adweek.com/news/television/shot-arm-expected-2012-political-ad-spend-137283>

<http://www.pqmedia.com/political-campaign-media-spending-2010.html#displayMore>

<http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/162573/political-ads-to-hit-32b-most-in-local-tv-buys.html>

<http://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/164719/election-year-tightens-ad-inventory-demands-nimbl.html>

<http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/campaign-finance>

<http://adage.com/article/news/guide-2012-super-pacs/231206/>

<http://www.downticketdems.com/?p=855>

[http://www.tvb.org/planning\\_buying/218718](http://www.tvb.org/planning_buying/218718)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/26/us/politics/ads-let-candidates-speak-for-themselves-to-their-detriment.html?\\_r=1&scp=9&sq=2012%20campaign%20spending%20advertising&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/26/us/politics/ads-let-candidates-speak-for-themselves-to-their-detriment.html?_r=1&scp=9&sq=2012%20campaign%20spending%20advertising&st=cse)

<http://adage.com/article/digital/hulu-makes-play-2012-political-dollars/230987/>

<http://www.opensecrets.org/>

<http://www.politicalconsultingblogger.com/2011/06/political-media-consultants.html>